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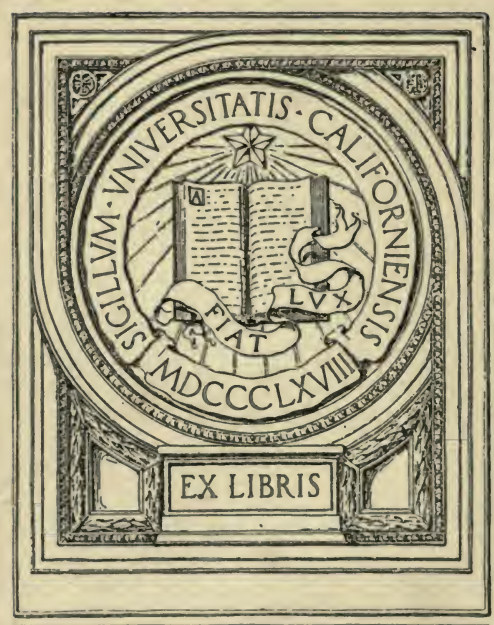
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THEY THE CRUCIFIED

and

COMRADES

—

Two War Plays

BY

FLORENCE TABER HOLT

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

BOSTON & NEW YORK
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THEY THE CRUCIFIED

A Play in One Act

". . . . . How are ye blind,
Ye treaders down of cities, ye that cast
Temples to desolation, and lay waste
Tombs, the untrodden sanctuaries where lie
The ancient dead; yourselves so soon to die!"

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

as they appear

THE OLD FARMER
THE MAKER OF CROSSES
THE GIRL
THE FRENCH CAPTAIN
A SERGEANT OF HIS REGIMENT
THE FRENCH SOLDIER
THE ZOUAVE
THE WOMAN
THE PRUSSIAN SOLDIER

The action takes place somewhere in France, on a hot late afternoon and evening in June, 1915.

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THEY THE CRUCIFIED

THE living-room of an old farmhouse that opens on a tiny courtyard, somewhere in northern France. Beyond it is a field of grain, at whose end a grove shelters an outpost of French artillery. The thick walls of the house are cracked, and, at the right of the door (C), a great gap has been hastily repaired by boughs, cotton coverlets — anything that could be stuffed into the hole. The dark, heavy wooden door, which is wide open against the wall, has also been damaged, and is held together by planks of light-colored basswood, that are nailed against it in the shape of a cross. Through the doorway the peaceful field of rye shimmers pale in the late afternoon light. Now and then, from the distance, come the detonations of cannon, but about the house it is still. Dark oak beams cross the ceiling; in the corner (L) is a square opening to the loft, against which leans a wooden ladder, so old that the rounds are almost worn through. The room is paved with dark tiles; at the right is a stone fireplace, in its

ample sooty chimney hangs a crane, and from it, over the embers of a wood fire, an iron pot is suspended; on the hearth stands a large kettle. Beyond the fireplace a square opening in the tiles shows steps that go down to the cellar, the large flat stone covering them being tilted back against the wall. To the right of the fireplace, a door opens into a garden. At the left (C), built into the wall, is a great bed of dark wood, paneled, with a canopy. On either side of it painted doors open into smaller bedrooms. To the left of the entrance door (C) is a window with latticed panes, and on the sill stands a dead rosebush in a pot. Beyond the window is a dark cupboard. An oak table in the center of the room has two earthenware bowls on it.

Close in front of the fire are drawn two rush chairs, on which two old men, in peasant costume, with sabots, are sitting. One of the old men has beside him a pile of naked boughs, about two feet in length, some gray and old, others newly stripped branches of green wood. He is working busily, tying the sticks together with rushes in the shape of a cross. The other man, who is feeble and bent with rheumatism, leans over and takes a dry stick from the worker's pile.

THE OLD FARMER

Thou canst spare this, stranger? The soup needs it!

[*Before the other can answer, the Old Farmer has thrown the stick on the embers, that blaze up.*]

THE MAKER OF CROSSES [*not looking up from his work*]

The *dead* need it! The graves are not all marked yet!

THE OLD FARMER

How many crosses hast thou made to-day?

THE MAKER OF CROSSES

I cannot keep count — I began at dawn.

THE OLD FARMER

Why dost thou do it?

THE MAKER OF CROSSES

I am too old to fight — and *now* [*in an anguished voice*] I cannot work! There are always graves to mark, so I follow the regiments. I put crosses on all alike, and always the same size.

THE OLD FARMER

Not on Germans!

THE MAKER OF CROSSES

I make no difference for the dead.

THE OLD FARMER

Thou art a good man — a Belgian — and say that!

THE MAKER OF CROSSES

I remember Christ and how He died for sinners. He was crucified, as we are, yet He forgave them!

THE OLD FARMER [*rocking to and fro*]

Crucified as we are! Thou art right! Four sons of mine have gone — the death of the last broke his mother's heart. [*Pointing to the bed.*] She was bedridden — and always there. I was never lonely then . . . Hadst thou sons too?

THE MAKER OF CROSSES

Three. Two were shot at Liège.

THE OLD FARMER

And the last?

THE MAKER OF CROSSES

No news [*wiping his brow*] — till to-day. For months I have looked in every face — turned every corpse . . . [*His voice breaking.*] This morning I found him —

THE OLD FARMER

Alive?

THE MAKER OF CROSSES

I was too late.

THE OLD FARMER [*after a pause, in which both old men sit still, looking at the fire*]

Hadst thou daughters?

THE MAKER OF CROSSES

I had two.

THE OLD FARMER [*eagerly*]

Are they — safe?

THE MAKER OF CROSSES

One is — the little one. [*He drops his work, and speaks in a whisper.*] The Germans put her in the front when we charged. I found her — shot through the back! [*He lifts his arms above his head.*] Some day I shall put

a crucifix over her grave! [*His arms fall, and he resumes his work.*] But now — I seek her sister!

THE OLD FARMER

Where?

THE MAKER OF CROSSES

Everywhere! I stop at every village, I search every ruined house. [*Excitedly, looking towards the small door at the right of the bed.*] I look, I listen!

THE OLD FARMER [*leaning forward and putting his hand on the Maker of Crosses' knee*]

I had a daughter.

THE MAKER OF CROSSES

I pity thee, friend!

THE OLD FARMER

She has gone . . . like thine. But *she* will never come back! She was a proud girl — almost a demoiselle; the nuns taught her. She was betrothed to my nephew, the last of our name. And we are an old family — three hundred years in this house. [*Fiercely.*] But it is better that we die out — after that night!

THE MAKER OF CROSSES

What night?

THE OLD FARMER

I cannot tell thee . . . [*Bowing his head.*] The Prussians came; she had to go with them. I am an old man — a blow blinded me — I could not see for the blood. And now [*throwing out his hands*] I am alone with my thoughts.

THE MAKER OF CROSSES [*pointing with a stick to the door at the right of the bed*]

I thought I heard a woman — stilling a child.

THE OLD FARMER

That is only the stranger girl — she was half dead; I took her in. God help me — I thought of my daughter! [*Pointing to the bed.*] The girl's child was born there.

THE MAKER OF CROSSES [*gripping the sticks he is holding with such force that they break, and the ends fall to the floor*]

God pity her — and hers!

[*The Old Farmer gets up and puts the broken pieces of wood carefully on the hearth at one side, and looks into the pot.*]

THE OLD FARMER

The soup is done. I will fill the kettle. "When the pot is off, the kettle should be on," my wife always said.

[*Taking up the kettle he starts towards the entrance, but he is too feeble to lift it far, and it falls from his hand.*]

THE MAKER OF CROSSES [*picking up the kettle*]

I will fill it. I saw where the spring was when I came in. [*Exit the Maker of Crosses.*]

THE OLD FARMER [*going to small door (R) and calling*]

Marie, the soup is done! Bring another bowl — we have a guest.

[*A young girl of about seventeen, in a poor coarse dark dress, comes out of the door. She has a baby in her arms, her hand held shelteringly above its face. She looks timidly about the room, but seeing no one but the Old Farmer, goes over to the cupboard, from which she takes a bowl which she puts on the table. As she does so, the Angelus sounds, and the Old Farmer bows his head and crosses himself.*]

THE OLD FARMER

"The angel of the Lord declared unto Mary, and she conceived of the Holy Ghost" . . . [*He pauses for response, and looks up at the girl.*] Why dost thou not say, "Hail Mary"?

THE GIRL

I cannot.

THE OLD FARMER

God will forgive much to those who suffer!

[*They both stand with bowed heads till the Angelus ceases, the Old Farmer repeating the responses softly to himself. When they are finished, he holds out his arms.*]

THE OLD FARMER

Give me the child! [*The Girl puts the child in his arms.*] Has he eaten to-day? [*The Girl shakes her head.*] Go thou to our neighbors — perhaps they will give thee a little milk. It is cooler; he may eat now.

THE GIRL

He is very weak —

THE OLD FARMER [*looking down at the child*]

How pinched his face is! Go, quickly! But not by the road — there are stragglers there.

[*The Girl, with a parting look at the child, goes out of the door (R). The Old Farmer sits down by the hearth, and rocks the child to and fro. The Maker of Crosses enters with the full kettle.*]

THE OLD FARMER

Lift the pot, stranger, and hang the kettle over the fire!

[*The Maker of Crosses does this, and carries the pot to the table, fills the bowls, and sets it back on the hearth. The Old Farmer hitches his chair to the table, and motions to his companion to sit down.*]

THE OLD FARMER [*taking up bowl with his right hand*]

This *is* soup! My neighbor's sheep was killed yesterday — his last one. He gave me the trimmings. It was a stray bullet, but [*chuckling*] the Blessed Virgin must have known how hungry we were! [*Setting the bowl on the table, and looking out over the field.*]

What if all the rye is lost! [*Pointing.*] Already half the field has gone!

THE MAKER OF CROSSES [*looking out also*]

How quiet they are now!

THE OLD FARMER

It means, perhaps — [*tremblingly*] the advance!

THE MAKER OF CROSSES

It will make more work for me.

[*He gets up and starts to move his chair back to the hearth, but stops, and looks over the Old Farmer's shoulder at the child.*]

THE OLD FARMER [*glancing up at the Maker of Crosses*]

It is a little Boche! Look at the straight white hair! But, God forgive me, my heart goes out to him!

THE MAKER OF CROSSES [*in a bitter tone, turning away and going over to his work*]

God puts strange lives by our hearths, but He would not have us turn away from them!

THE OLD FARMER

You seem to know his ways!

THE MAKER OF CROSSES [*bitterly*]

Who does not, these days — or the Devil's? I am a maker of crucifixes from Louvain — since the Germans came — [*Bowing his head.*] I can carve no more! [*In an anguished voice.*] Men are hung on them now — and women — and little children! [*With a gesture of horror.*] I cannot keep Christ's face in my mind — I see theirs!

[*Suddenly the door (C) is darkened by the figures of three men, a captain of the ——, wearing the ribbon of the Legion of Honor, a man still young, but with deep lines in his face and snow-white hair, behind whom are a sergeant and a soldier of the same regiment. The Soldier carries a lighted lantern, which the Sergeant motions him to put on the table.*]

THE FRENCH CAPTAIN [*to the Sergeant*]

Which is the farmer?

THE SERGEANT [*pointing to the Old Farmer, who has risen at their entrance*]

This is he. His reputation is good. Four

sons already given to France, and he himself wounded at Sedan.

THE FRENCH CAPTAIN [*raising his hand*]

You have done your part, comrade! [*Turning and looking at the Maker of Crosses.*] And he?

THE SERGEANT [*expressively, touching his forehead*]

It is he who puts crosses on the graves. A Belgian — we saw him in Flanders. He follows the regiments.

THE FRENCH CAPTAIN [*looking about the room*]

Is there any one else?

THE SERGEANT

A girl.

THE FRENCH CAPTAIN

Where?

[*The Sergeant turns to the Old Farmer.*]

THE OLD FARMER [*tremblingly*]

She has gone to our neighbors for milk for the little one; she should be here now.

THE SERGEANT [*stepping forward*]

She is harmless — a Belgian. [*The Maket of Crosses starts, goes over and looks eagerly at the child, to which the Sergeant points.*] She has paid the price.

THE FRENCH CAPTAIN [*impressively, to the Old Farmer*]

The wire to headquarters [*pointing up*] has been tapped. It is thought that some one hides here. Nothing was found when my men searched to-day — so I came myself. Is there any place they have not looked?

THE OLD FARMER [*eagerly*]

No, my Captain! They have been everywhere! Here [*gesticulating*] — in the barn — they were in every corner this morning.

THE FRENCH CAPTAIN [*sternly*]

But a message was intercepted later! [*Studying the Old Farmer's face.*] Were you out of the house, after the search?

THE OLD FARMER

Yes, my Captain, in the rye-field. We must save what we can!

THE FRENCH CAPTAIN

And the girl?

THE OLD FARMER

She took the child there too. She was afraid to be left alone.

THE FRENCH CAPTAIN [*putting his hand kindly on the Old Farmer's shoulder, and looking him in the eyes*]

Has nothing suspicious happened? I must know everything.

THE OLD FARMER [*tremblingly*]

Last night [*pointing to the door* (*R*)] I bolted it; this morning — it was open!

THE CAPTAIN

Then the man was inside! [*Angrily.*] Why did you not tell the Sergeant? We might have caught him!

THE OLD FARMER

I was frightened; I thought he might suspect —

THE CAPTAIN

Whom?

THE OLD FARMER

The girl.

THE CAPTAIN [*turning quickly to the Sergeant*]

See that she is searched when she gets back. And now, look everywhere again! [*Glancing about the room.*] This bed? Was it pulled out?

THE SERGEANT

It is built into the wall, but one sees under it! [*Kneeling down and looking through the grating in the woodwork.*] The whole frame is exposed. [*The Sergeant gets up.*] And the mattress — so! [*He tosses bedclothes and pillows to one side, and lifts the mattress, which drops back into place.*]

[*The Captain goes over to a small door to left of bed, which he opens, and looks into the room beyond.*]

THE CAPTAIN

Who sleeps here?

THE OLD FARMER

I do, my Captain.

[*The Captain glances about the room, closes the door and crosses over to the other small door to right of bed.*]

THE CAPTAIN

And here?

THE OLD FARMER

The girl.

THE CAPTAIN [*to the Sergeant*]

Search carefully! Turn out her things in the chest! Look in every pocket!

[*The Sergeant enters the Girl's room. The Captain points to the cellar steps, which the Soldier runs down. In a moment he returns, throwing out his hands.*]

THE SOLDIER

Nothing, my Captain! No wood — nothing! They are poor to the bone!

[*Re-enter the Sergeant*]

THE SERGEANT

Not a paper — no clothes!

[*The Captain motions to the loft, and the Sergeant runs hastily up the ladder; soon he returns.*]

THE SERGEANT

The loft is the same — dried onions and dust — but, now [*holding out something in his hand to the Captain*] this!

THE CAPTAIN [*taking the object from the Sergeant, and going over to the light*]

Copper wire! [*To the Sergeant.*] He has been there since you were! [*The Captain puts the wire in his pocket, and, turning to the Soldier, points to the Old Farmer.*] Follow me to headquarters with him!

[*The Soldier goes over and lays his hand on the Old Farmer's shoulder.*]

THE OLD FARMER [*holding the child out*]

But, my Captain! The child!

[*The Maker of Crosses comes forward and holds out his hands for the child.*]

THE CAPTAIN [*to the Maker of Crosses*]

I want you too. [*To the Old Farmer.*] Put the child on the bed — it is asleep.

[*The Old Farmer puts the child on the disordered bed, propping it with pillows.*]

THE CAPTAIN [*to the Sergeant*]

Remain, and search the girl! If you find anything, bring her to me. If not, report at once.

[*The Captain goes toward the door* (*C*), *and the Soldier starts to follow with the Old Farmer and the Maker of Crosses,*

but all stop as a young Zouave, with a letter in his hand, enters hurriedly.]

THE ZOUAVE [*saluting*]

Captain Dupont?

[*The Captain nods, and the Zouave hands the letter to him. The Captain goes over to the bed, on which he sits, opens the envelope and spreads the contents out in front of him; the envelope falls to one side, against the paneled back of the bed. The Zouave, though he stands at rigid attention in front of the Captain, is making expressive grimaces at the Old Farmer, who, held back by the Soldier, is trying to get to him.*]

THE OLD FARMER [*querulously, to the Soldier*]

It is François — my nephew!

THE SERGEANT [*in a low voice, pointing to the Captain*]

If it were Saint Gabriel — be still, till the Captain has finished his dispatches!

THE CAPTAIN [*rising and gathering up the papers, all but the envelope, which he does not notice, and turning to the Zouave*]

It is not known that your regiment has

arrived. Wait here for your answer. It is better so [*half to himself*] — the ground has ears! [*To the Sergeant.*] I will send shortly. [*To the Soldier.*] Follow, with the men!

[*Exit Captain, at door (C).*]

[*The Zouave runs over to the Old Farmer, whom he detains, kissing him on both cheeks.*]

THE ZOUAVE

I thanked the Holy Virgin when they sent us here! But Lucile! [*Looking around fearfully.*] Where is she? [*The Old Farmer does not answer, and the Zouave points to the bed.*] Whose child is that? [*Quickly.*] My God, Uncle! Why dost thou not speak? Where is she? I have written — letter after letter — but no answers!

THE OLD FARMER [*pointing to the cupboard*]

Thy letters are there!

THE ZOUAVE [*fiercely*]

But Lucile?

THE OLD FARMER

She is gone! [*Reaching out his trembling*

hands.] God forgive me, François! [*Dropping his hands, his head bowed.*] The Germans took her.

THE ZOUAVE [*the cords on his neck swelling, his face dark and terrible*]

How long ago?

THE OLD FARMER

I cannot remember — for days I was as one dead.

THE ZOUAVE

And not a word!

THE OLD FARMER

She was like that — [*Shaking his head.*] We shall never hear!

THE ZOUAVE [*his hands convulsively opening and shutting*]

What regiment was it?

THE OLD FARMER

The —— Prussians.

THE ZOUAVE

God is merciful! [*Pointing excitedly to the grove, and putting his other hand on his bayonet.*] They are beyond there!

THE SERGEANT [*coming forward to the Zouave, whispering*]

To-night! As soon as it is dark, your regiment will advance.

THE ZOUAVE [*breathing heavily*]

Are you sure?

THE SERGEANT

I see it in my Captain's face! He is like one possessed!

THE ZOUAVE

I thought he was a young man — but his hair is white!

THE SERGEANT

White since the day he went back to his home, and found no one — no wife — no child! I was with him and saw his face. He never speaks — but he waits. I know him. [*In a whisper.*] The advance is to-night! [*Turning to the Soldier; impatiently.*] What are you waiting for? [*Motioning to the Old Farmer and the Maker of Crosses to follow the Soldier.*] March!

[*Exit the Soldier, followed by the Old Farmer and the Maker of Crosses, door*

(C). A sudden burst of firing is heard from the grove.]

THE SERGEANT [*exultantly*]

It has begun! [*To the Zouave.*] To the edge of the wood! We can see there! It will be a little while yet before the Captain's answer comes.

[*The Sergeant and the Zouave run out of the door (C). The firing continues; now and then a bursting shell explodes near, but everything in the room is quiet, and the child has not stirred. As the evening darkens the lantern's light shows brighter, shining on the polished table and the worn tiles. Suddenly one of the panels behind the bed is moved softly, and an arm in gray steals out, the hand grasps the envelope, which it draws stealthily back, slipping the panel noiselessly in place. After a few moments a woman enters the door (C) and peers anxiously about the room, till suddenly her eyes are focused on the motionless child. She draws nearer the bed and looks down scornfully at him. The Belgian girl enters the door (R), a bowl of milk in her hand, goes hurriedly to*

the bed, and leans anxiously over the child. Her hands tremble so violently that some milk falls on his face, and he cries out. The Woman takes the bowl from the Girl, who lifts the child in her arms.]

THE GIRL

Moisten your finger in the milk and put it in his mouth! Sometimes he will suck it so.

[*The Woman does this, but the child turns his head away.*]

THE GIRL [*anxiously*]

He is too weak!

THE WOMAN [*looking curiously at the girl*]

You love him?

THE GIRL [*holding the child closer*]

Something pulls at my heart when he cries — or holds up his little hands!

THE WOMAN [*sternly*]

Where did it happen?

THE GIRL [*burying her face on the child's shoulder*]

At Louvain.

THE WOMAN [*putting the bowl on the table, and walking up and down, excitedly*]

It is *you* who are the martyrs! [*Beating her breast with her clenched fist.*] *We* strike back — even women — as I!

[*Her loud tones startle the child, who cries out, and the Girl hushes him against her breast. The Woman comes back and looks at him.*]

THE WOMAN

How blue his lips are! It can be only a little while. [*Looking up at the Girl.*] Surely it is better so.

THE GIRL

I cannot think now [*drawing her hand across her brow*] — something here is dead.

THE WOMAN [*in a fierce voice*]

I am not like that! With me [*striking her breast*] it is fire! I have hunger still!

THE GIRL [*moving toward the table*]

I will get you some soup.

THE WOMAN

No, no, you don't understand! [*Her eyes*

narrowing.] It is another hunger — to make *them* suffer, as we have! They took me away . . . these three months [*shuddering*] — always in their lines. But to-night! [*Lifting up her arms.*] I got through — I know these woods! *Know* them? [*She laughs wildly, and points to the room.*] It's my home! I wanted to see it once more! [*Looking suddenly at the Girl.*] Are there letters for me?

THE GIRL [*pointing to the cupboard*]

They are there! If you are Lucile?

THE WOMAN

I was. [*She goes over to the cupboard, and takes out the package of letters which she puts in her breast. Turning back to the Girl, her voice trembling.*] My father — is he alive?

THE GIRL

He is very feeble, and he watches always for you. [*As the Woman shakes her head.*] Oh, do not go away! He needs you!

THE WOMAN

France needs me! [*Throwing back her head.*] They have gone too far! I am a sword in their side!

THE GIRL

But your father!

THE WOMAN

It is best he should think me dead. [*Looking down.*] For *I* am dead — the girl who was his daughter. Do not tell him you saw me. [*She starts toward the door* (*R*).]

THE GIRL [*timidly*]

They have arrested him.

THE WOMAN [*coming back; angrily*]

Arrested him? My father! [*Proudly.*] He is a Frenchman. [*Fiercely.*] Who?

THE GIRL

The soldiers.

THE WOMAN

Why?

THE GIRL

I do not know — the neighbors told me — they have just taken him away.

THE WOMAN

Are they mad?

THE GIRL [*fearfully*]

They think some one hides here. A Boche — [*pointing overhead*] the wire is tapped.

THE WOMAN [*starting back, and pointing to panels behind the bed*]

Have they searched *there?*

THE GIRL [*holding the child closer to her breast, and stepping back fearfully*]

Where?

THE WOMAN [*still pointing*]

Back of the panel; we children hid there — it was a secret; mother knew, but we begged her not to tell our father; [*swiftly, in a low voice*] there is space for a man. My God! [*Gazing fixedly before her.*] Don't you see? [*Whispering.*] In that hole — the eye! [*Stooping down and taking a pistol from a pocket in her petticoat.*] Go for help!

[*A young German of the —— Prussians, stout, with close-cropped, whitish hair, slips back the panel, steps on the bed, and attempts to jump to the floor, but his foot is entangled in the bedclothes, and he falls heavily forward on his face.*

The woman runs to the door (C), which she closes quickly, putting her back against it.]

THE GIRL [*staggering back as she gazes wildly at the German*]

You! You!

THE WOMAN

Hands up! I stole your colonel's pistol last night! [*Pointing towards the Girl, who has recoiled against the wall.*] Do you remember *her?* [*As the man struggles up.*] Probably not — you were drunk at Louvain. But [*with concentrated hate*] *me* you remember as I *you!* [*Triumphantly.*] Oh, this world's a small place — you've come to my home!

[*The German runs toward the Woman, who shoots; though she wounds him in the right arm, he wrenches the pistol from her, and starts to open the door (C), but the Sergeant and the Zouave rush in, and the three men struggle together. In a moment the German is down, the Zouave on top of him and reaching for his knife, but the Sergeant holds the Zouave's hands.*]

THE SERGEANT

No, no! He is the wire-tapper! I must take him to headquarters.

[*The Zouave looks up at the Woman, who is panting as she leans against the wall.*]

THE ZOUAVE [*wildly*]

Have I not the right? Is he not mine?

THE WOMAN

Yes — [*desperately*] and most of his regiment!

[*The Zouave attempts to stab the German, but the Sergeant struggles with him.*]

THE SERGEANT

This is no time for vengeance! We need him! [*To the Woman.*] Speak, woman! Tell him to let him go!

THE WOMAN

He is right. Take him to headquarters! As for me [*sneeringly, as she shrugs her shoulders*] I am not worth revenge.

THE SERGEANT [*to the Girl*]

Is there no rope?

[*The Girl gets a roll of cord from the cup-*

board, which she hands the Sergeant. He and the Zouave pull the German to his feet, bind his left arm above the elbow, leaving the hand free. The right arm is bleeding and the Sergeant cuts the sleeve away, and winds about it a bandage he takes from his pocket. The Zouave cuts the German's boot-lacings and suspenders. He is just able to hold his trousers up with his left hand.]

THE SERGEANT

March, Boche!

[*The Sergeant and the German go out door* (*C*); *the Old Farmer and the Maker of Crosses enter. The Old Farmer runs to his daughter, whom he embraces, and the Maker of Crosses goes over to the Girl, who does not notice him, so absorbed is she in watching the child.*]

THE MAKER OF CROSSES

Marie! My child! [*As she does not look up.*] Dost thou not know me?

THE GIRL [*pointing to the child in her arms*]

Father, I love him.

[*The Maker of Crosses takes her and the*

child in his arms. He makes the sign of the Cross on the child's forehead.]

THE GIRL [*fearfully*]

Is he dead?

[*The Maker of Crosses nods his head slowly, and the Girl leans against him, burying her face on the child's breast.*]

THE OLD FARMER

Lucile! Thou wilt stay with me now!

THE WOMAN [*wildly*]

I cannot! I work for France. Already I have sent back messages. [*Pointing to the grove.*] Much that they know there — is through me.

THE ZOUAVE [*sternly*]

Even for *that* — thou canst not go back! Thou must remain and help thy father! Look at him! [*In a low voice.*] The end is near!

THE WOMAN [*bitterly*]

I cannot help now! I can only hate! [*Covering her face with her hands.*] Oh, I am lost! lost!

THE MAKER OF CROSSES [*as the Woman turns away*]

They have taken your body! Don't let them take your soul!

[*The Woman breaks into sobs, and throws herself down on a chair by the table, burying her face on her arms, and the Zouave turns indignantly on the Maker of Crosses.*]

THE ZOUAVE

Has she not suffered enough? What right have you to speak to her so?

THE MAKER OF CROSSES

What right? The right of one who suffers as she! [*Pointing to the child.*] This child of shame is my dead, and its broken mother mine — the last of my own! God has filled my cup to the brim!

THE ZOUAVE [*bitterly*]

And yet you do not doubt Him!

THE MAKER OF CROSSES [*lifting his head, his eyes looking beyond to a vision the others cannot see*]

Doubt Him! Nor would you, had you

seen what I have! I follow the battle, and, where everything else is destroyed, hanging from splinter or broken cross Christ accuses these spoilers of humanity.

[*As he speaks the Sergeant and one of the soldiers enter hurriedly, carrying in their arms the Captain, who is badly wounded.*]

THE WOMAN [*who has not noticed the others' entrance*]

But my revenge! For that — [*breathing deeply, her hands clenching*] I must go back!

THE OLD FARMER [*tottering forward, as he holds out his hands*]

Stay with me, daughter, stay!

[*The Sergeant places the Captain in one of the chairs; as it grates on the tiles, the Woman turns and sees them, jumps up and runs over to the cupboard, takes from it a roll of linen, which she hands to the Sergeant, who stanches the blood and tries to bind up the wound. The Captain raises his hand, which has fallen at his side, and fumbles in his coat. The Sergeant reaches forward and takes from it an envelope which he hands to the*

Zouave, who salutes and goes toward the door (C), but turns and runs over to the Woman, kneels down and kisses the hem of her dress, and then goes hurriedly out.]

THE SERGEANT [*calling after the Zouave*]
Send a doctor!

THE CAPTAIN
I shall fight no more — it is the end. [*To the Woman, his voice very low.*] You must stay with your father — France needs her homes . . . I — I too [*his head falls lower*] must forget revenge — but France — her need — that must *never* be forgotten! And *she* remembers!

[*His head falls forward on his breast, and in a moment he is dead.*]

[*The Sergeant lays the Captain's body on the tiles, crossing his hands on his breast. The scream of shrapnel is heard, and a shell bursts near the house. The Sergeant straightens himself and listens. Another, and then another, follows, and at the next shell the Sergeant turns hastily to the Woman.*]

THE SERGEANT
To the cellar, you! The Boches have the

range! [*Turning to the Captain's body and saluting.*] But we, my Captain, we follow!

[*Exit hastily, at door (C).*]

[*The Woman, supporting the Old Farmer, goes hurriedly down the steps to the cellar, but the Maker of Crosses stands looking down at the Captain's body, still holding the dead child in his arms, and the Girl hesitates, leaning against the door, watching him. After a moment the Maker of Crosses walks over to the pile of wood by the fireplace, takes up a cross, a stick, and a reed, and returns to the Captain's body, on whose breast he puts the cross. Kneeling down, he places the child by the Captain's side, and, making a tiny cross of the stick, lays it on his breast. Shells are bursting about the house, and the Maker of Crosses rises, turns towards the cellar stairs, and sees the Girl.*]

THE MAKER OF CROSSES

Quick! To the cellar! [*In an anguished voice.*] Thou art all I have!

[*As he speaks there is a terrific explosion and the room is filled with smoke. When it clears away, the Maker of Crosses*

staggers forward to the door, against which the Girl has fallen back dead, her arms outstretched on the light boards as if she were nailed to a cross.]

THE MAKER OF CROSSES [*in a terrible voice*]

"Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."

CURTAIN

COMRADES

A Play in One Act

"Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire; your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left . . . as a besieged city."

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

as they appear

CLAIRE DE MONTPALET
FRITZ VON BECKNER
MATHILDE
COUNT DE MONTPALET
COLONEL GOLTZ
SERGEANT AND TWO SOLDIERS
CAPTAIN VON POPPE

Action takes place in the garden of, and inside, an old château near Brussels, in the summer of 1914.

First Scene, afternoon in the garden of Count de Montpalet's château, outside Brussels.

Second Scene, Claire de Montpalet's bedroom, overlooking garden.

COMRADES

SCENE I

A YOUNG *girl, simply dressed in white, with a large blue apron pinned about her, her hair braided down her back, is leaning over an improvised ironing-board in the garden of an old château, whose gray façade is half covered with vines and climbing roses. Behind her is a recessed porch, about whose sides climbs an old grapevine, so strong that it could easily support a man's weight. The vine forks below an open latticed window, above which its immature clusters hang. Near the porch is a fountain whose lilies are uprooted, the dead plants thrown below the broad stone edge. The flower-beds in front of the house are defaced, trodden down in places, the box borders crushed, and the standard roses, on either side of the walk, bent or broken, but enough bloom remains in the old garden to make it still a charming place, and the young girl looks lovingly across it, as she goes on with her work. She is ironing napkin after napkin, and, as she folds one, she drops it deftly into a basket by her side. She is*

singing softly to herself, so absorbed in her work that she does not notice a young German officer in the uniform of the —— Bavarians, who has come out of the door (R) in the porch, and stands in the shadow, watching her.

CLAIRE [*singing*]

"Ma chandelle est morte
Je n'ai plus de feu,
Ouvre-moi ta porte
Pour l'amour de Dieu!"

[*Suddenly the girl looks up, and the young man throws his cigarette away, and comes over to her side.*]

VON BECKNER

I must protest, Gräfin!

CLAIRE

And so must I, Monsieur !

VON BECKNER [*smiling*]

Shall it be Comtesse, then?

CLAIRE

Not even Mamma is called that; she is Madame always. Marie is Mademoiselle, and I [*shrugging her shoulders*] — I am just Mademoiselle Claire!

VON BECKNER [*slowly emphasizing each syllable*]

Mad'-moi-selle Claire! Ah, but it kinks my poor tongue! But [*pointing to her ironing, which she goes on with*] it is of this I protest!

CLAIRE

Poor Mathilde cannot do everything; I must help.

VON BECKNER

But to work for *us!*

CLAIRE

It is for *her*, and [*looking up at him*] for something that we both, enemies as we are, hold sacred: you are — in a way — our guests!

VON BECKNER [*thoughtfully*]

You are always wise, Mademoiselle Claire. Would you tell me — if I asked — how old you are? Sometimes you seem very young, like my sister, and again — I cannot tell!

CLAIRE [*drawing herself up*]

I am almost seventeen!

VON BECKNER

My sister's age! That is, if [*smiling*] that means sixteen and a half?

CLAIRE [*hanging her head*]

Sixteen and a half next month! But [*looking up proudly*] every one says I look older!

VON BECKNER

So you do! My sister's a backfisch, and will be for years, but you are —

CLAIRE [*complacently nodding*]

Experienced.

VON BECKNER [*amused*]

One sees that! But — how did it come so soon?

CLAIRE

Some one had to take care of Papa. Mamma and Marie are always away — Paris or Trouville. Papa likes it best here. So do I. And I watch over him. Oh, you know him now! If he has his head in a book, the world is lost!

VON BECKNER

So you learned to be wise — here?

CLAIRE [*seriously*]

And in Papa's library. But how to live — I learned that at the convent.

VON BECKNER [*smiling*]

I would hardly call that living!

CLAIRE

Oh, yes, you would, if you knew! Hard living, too! [*Looking down.*] I was stubborn when I came — the Mother Superior saw that. I had to scrub the refectory steps for a week! [*Feeling in her breast for a medal she has on a chain, and holding it out to Von Beckner.*] She gave me that when I confessed. It was hard work!

VON BECKNER [*indignantly*]

She ought not to have put you at it!

CLAIRE

Oh, the scrubbing was nothing; it was giving in! I like work!

VON BECKNER

I wish you'd teach me!

CLAIRE [*shaking her head*]

I am all Mathilde needs. Though [*indig-*

nantly] our maids should not have run away! [*Proudly.*] Our men, of course, went to serve, but [*scornfully*] the women were afraid!

VON BECKNER [*decidedly*]

You were not!

CLAIRE

I? Why should I be? I am only a girl, but [*laying down the iron and looking before her, her eyebrows drawn together*] when I *can* help, I will! If I were a boy — I would fight!

VON BECKNER

God forbid! But it's all over now. Belgium is conquered.

CLAIRE [*indignantly*]

Conquered? You don't know us! [*Pointing to the defaced garden.*] We're ruined and lost and dead, but conquered, never! You remember what Cæsar said?

VON BECKNER

But that's ancient history!

CLAIRE

It's now!

VON BECKNER

But this is a different world: with Efficiency — king!

CLAIRE [*throwing back her head, proudly*]

Only for a day! [*Turning quickly, her face radiant.*] You and I know!

VON BECKNER [*softly*]

What?

CLAIRE

Who is king; it's Love, not Hate. [*Earnestly.*] Deep down in your heart you know!

VON BECKNER

Deep down in my heart I know!

CLAIRE [*resuming her work*]

And you can't hate us all!

VON BECKNER

I certainly can't!

CLAIRE [*looking up with a smile*]

And you're not all bad; I see that!

VON BECKNER [*fervently*]

Thank God, you do!

CLAIRE [*thoughtfully*]

When we heard you were coming, Papa said: "They are to be quartered on us, the devils!" Now don't mind that — you would have done the same! And I said: "Papa, they are not *all* uncivilized!" [*Decidedly.*] And I was right! But he was wild to send me away.

VON BECKNER [*anxiously*]

Why did n't he?

CLAIRE

I was at the convent when Mamma and Marie went.

VON BECKNER

Why did n't you follow?

CLAIRE

I knew Papa would get into trouble alone. *He* could n't go — it would have been deserting. So I said I would stay too.

VON BECKNER

How could he let you?

CLAIRE

It was too late then. And it's best — he must have an adviser.

VON BECKNER [*smiling*]

Does he call you that?

CLAIRE

No, *I* do! [*Emphatically.*] And I am. But I have dreadful moments. Any day he may say what he thinks of you! At first, he said: "If I speak at all, I shall call them Arch-Fiends!" And then the head one —

VON BECKNER

Who?

CLAIRE

Your General von Gertner! *He* turned out to be a friend! Papa knew him in the Congo; they have corresponded. Now even Papa sees that *some* of you are human.

VON BECKNER [*quickly*]

Who is not?

CLAIRE [*turning away and shrugging her shoulders*]

Oh, no one.

VON BECKNER [*impulsively*]

That's not true, Mademoiselle! You would scorn me, if I were n't that!

CLAIRE

To an enemy, yes! But one can fib a little to a friend!

VON BECKNER [*eagerly*]

Then you do call me one?

CLAIRE [*laying down her iron, looking away, and sighing*]

I have always wanted a brother!

VON BECKNER [*taking Claire's hand in his*]

Do stop that work! [*Pointing to the edge of the fountain.*] Come and sit down! [*Putting his hand in his pocket.*] I have some crumbs here for the fish —

CLAIRE [*drawing her hand away from his, putting the tip of her finger in her mouth, and making a little face as she touches the bottom of the iron with it*]

It *is* cold! [*Putting the iron down, and going over to Von Beckner, who is brushing the leaves*

away from the fountain edge.] A tiny moment, if you'll tell me about your sister. I don't even know her name.

VON BECKNER

Clärchen.

CLAIRE

Like mine! How amusing! And how pretty, too — it sounds like little bells! But [*after a pause, looking up*] I like mine better.

VON BECKNER

So do I.

CLAIRE

It's like a still tide —

VON BECKNER

And the moon shining deep down in it!

CLAIRE [*looking away*]

Some of you are like your music. Not cold and sinister, like —

VON BECKNER [*eagerly*]

Whom?

CLAIRE [*slowly*]

Colonel Goltz.

VON BECKNER

I knew you meant him!

CLAIRE

Why?

VON BECKNER

I've seen him look at you.

CLAIRE [*getting up and shaking her head, as if she shook off an evil impression*]

You all do that!

VON BECKNER [*angrily, as he rises*]

But not as he does!

CLAIRE

Oh, I always know what *you're* thinking of!

VON BECKNER

Always?

CLAIRE [*decidedly*]

Always!

VON BECKNER

Perhaps, and [*more softly*] perhaps not!

CLAIRE

Well, I always know I'd like it, if I knew!

VON BECKNER

I wish I thought that!

CLAIRE

And Captain von Poppe! Any one knows what's in his mind!

VON BECKNER

He generally manages to let them!

CLAIRE

And *how* fervently! [*Imitating a South German accent.*] "Oh, Mademoiselle Claire, that adorable omelette!" [*Rolling up her eyes, and waving her hand before her.*] Or was it [*resuming the rapt expression*] "that heavenly ragout"? [*Smiling.*] He is almost religious!

VON BECKNER

Oh, Von Poppe is an ass, but a good one, and a good soldier, too, in spite of all this nonsense about receipts. But we are not all that —

CLAIRE [*quickly*]

No; Colonel Goltz [*turning away*] — I would n't want to know what *he* thinks of!

VON BECKNER [*impatiently*]

He's a machine, cold as —

CLAIRE [*interrupting quickly*]

One of your cannons; but then fire, and [*shuddering*] fire that kills!

VON BECKNER [*suddenly*]

You're afraid of him?

CLAIRE [*proudly*]

I'm afraid of no one — but myself! But [*looking down*] he makes me that!

VON BECKNER

He's no German —

CLAIRE

He's a Prussian!

VON BECKNER

Not like the Germans I know; they've hearts! I'm a fool to say it! But [*leaning toward her*] you said we were friends?

CLAIRE [*smiling*]

How many days have I known you? [*Counting on her fingers.*] Six.

VON BECKNER [*passionately*]

I've known you always! I've never looked at a girl without looking for you! [*Taking her hand.*] We're more than friends!

CLAIRE [*ingenuously*]

"Kamaraden"? Is that what you say?

VON BECKNER

I meant something nearer — closer —

CLAIRE [*decidedly*]

Oh, there's *nothing!* [*Drawing her hand away.*] I've heard Papa say that! Friends grow apart, lovers cold — I've listened when Mamma and Marie talk — even husbands and wives [*looking away with a little frown*] — I've seen that! But comrades, never! [*Seriously.*] Do you think a girl and a man can be that?

VON BECKNER

I'm sure of it!

CLAIRE

Have you ever had one?

VON BECKNER

Among men, many.

CLAIRE

But never a girl?

VON BECKNER

No.

CLAIRE

I'm glad! [*Holding out her hands to him, which he takes. They swing hands to and fro, like children.*] That means —

VON BECKNER [*smiling*]

That means?

CLAIRE

We respect each other —

VON BECKNER

God knows I do that!

CLAIRE

I mean — as equals!

VON BECKNER

Of course!

CLAIRE [*nodding her head to him*]

You do what I say, and I do what you tell

me to! It's not [*imitating his manner*]—"I'm older, Mademoiselle, *I* judge!" Now imagine! Suppose . . . [*as she pauses, they swing hands to and fro*] suppose . . .

VON BECKNER

Is it a game?

CLAIRE

No, no, it's real! I might be . . . [*looking up and smiling*] some time . . . in danger! Who knows? [*Laughing.*] Perhaps I'm a spy?

VON BECKNER [*earnestly*]

Nonsense!

CLAIRE [*coaxingly*]

Well, just suppose! If I say: "Shoot, comrade!" [*putting her hand on her breast*]—you shoot!

VON BECKNER

God forbid!

CLAIRE

You would have to, if your comrade told you to!

VON BECKNER

Only if *I* had to die too! And first!

CLAIRE [*thoughtfully*]

But there are times when a man must!

VON BECKNER [*fearfully*]

Claire! What do you mean? Tell me! Has any one —

[*Before Claire can answer, a stout, middle-aged woman in a blue cotton dress, skirt and sleeves pinned back, a large checked apron covering her ample figure, comes hurriedly from a door (L) at the end of the porch*]

CLAIRE [*dropping Von Beckner's hand, and turning quickly*]

What is it, Mathilde?

MATHILDE

Your father, dear Mademoiselle — he is like one distraught!

CLAIRE

What has happened?

MATHILDE

They have come to arrest him!

CLAIRE

Arrest Papa? Then I must go!

VON BECKNER

What *can* it mean?

MATHILDE

God knows! Not I! [*Turning to Von Beckner.*] Not that old man, as innocent of evil [*pointing to Claire*] as she! But he must go!

CLAIRE

Who says so?

MATHILDE

The Colonel! When he looked at the papers the soldiers brought, he said, "At once."

VON BECKNER

That's like him!

MATHILDE [*turning as noise is heard outside; to Claire*]

Here comes your Papa!

[*Enter hurriedly, at door (L), a small dark man with gray hair and pointed beard, who is gesticulating excitedly. He is followed by a sergeant and a soldier, who salute Von Beckner, and stand at one side of the door.*]

COUNT DE MONTPALET [*in a high-pitched voice; to Von Beckner*]

It is a mistake — a damned mistake! [*Perceiving Claire.*] My poor child! I did not see you, but it *is* a damned mistake, just the same!

CLAIRE

What shall we do, Papa?

COUNT DE MONTPALET

What *can* we do? [*Throwing out his hands.*] I spoke to that iron man. "Go at once!" he said. No regrets, no assurances! [*Lifting his hands above his head.*] Holy Virgin, what have I endured! These — Boches, and for this!

CLAIRE [*in a warning voice*]

Papa!

COUNT DE MONTPALET

I know, I know . . . but have I not been a lamb? Not a word, always still — almost dumb! And now this arrest! For what? [*Scornfully.*] Am I *too* dumb? It is beyond human power to be still now!

[*As he speaks, a tall man with piercing eyes, who looks like a wolf, comes out on the porch from the door* (*R*).]

CLAIRE [*lifting her head proudly as she turns to him*]

Of what is my father accused, Colonel Goltz?

GOLTZ

Communicating with the enemy.

CLAIRE [*starting*]

By what means?

GOLTZ [*giving her a quick glance*]

That was all the order said.

COUNT DE MONTPALET

It is absurd! [*Pointing to the two officers.*] "Communicating with the enemy!" Oh, *that* is true! Whom else can I communicate with? [*To Goltz.*] Do you arrest me for that? This is too much!

GOLTZ [*sternly*]

This does no good, Count de Montpalet. You must go, and at once.

COUNT DE MONTPALET [*to Claire*]

Get your things, my child!

GOLTZ

That is impossible.

COUNT DE MONTPALET

She cannot remain!

GOLTZ

She cannot go! You would be separated immediately. [*To the sergeant.*] Take your prisoner.

[*The sergeant goes forward and touches Count de Montpalet on the shoulder.*]

COUNT DE MONTPALET [*breaking down and holding his head in his hands*]

My God, what *shall* I do? I cannot leave her!

[*Von Beckner, with an exclamation of distress, goes over to the sergeant and looks at the paper he takes from his breast. Claire puts her arms about her father.*]

CLAIRE

We cannot resist, Papa! But you are no spy! They will see that at once. And you can send word to General von Gertner. He is a just man, and your friend. It will all come out right!

COUNT DE MONTPALET

But I cannot leave you!

CLAIRE

You must! And go quickly. [*Smiling.*] You will be back all the sooner!

COUNT DE MONTPALET

But to leave you alone!

CLAIRE

Mathilde is here!

COUNT DE MONTPALET [*impatiently*]

You are a child! You know nothing! What could Mathilde do?

CLAIRE [*reassuringly*]

What could happen? Be calm, dear Papa! They [*pointing to the two officers*] have eaten our salt, and one is of our faith.

[*Goltz, who has been coolly watching Claire, draws nearer to her and her father; unobserved by them he listens to what she says.*]

CLAIRE

Fritz von Beckner has a sister just my

age, and the same name — think of it! He and I are comrades. [*Impulsively.*] He'll take care of me — with his life!

[*The sergeant, at a signal from Colonel Goltz, steps forward, and Mathilde, who has disappeared, returns with Count de Montpalet's hat and cloak, takes them to him, and helps him on with them. Count de Montpalet, with a hurried embrace to Claire, goes out of the door (L) with the soldiers, followed by Mathilde, who is crying quietly, wiping her eyes with her apron. Goltz starts to go out of the door (R), but looks back at Von Beckner.*]

GOLTZ

Our orders have come. We advance at dawn. I am going to Headquarters now for a conference. When I come back I want everything ready.

[*Von Beckner salutes, and Goltz goes out after a hasty glance at Claire, who stands looking straight before her, her head thrown proudly back. Von Beckner starts toward her, but the door (L) is opened suddenly by a stout, red-faced officer, who comes on to the porch,*

wiping his flushed face with a handkerchief.]

VON BECKNER [*turning impatiently*]

We're off, Von Poppe, have you heard? At dawn. There's a lot to be done. [*Pointing to the house.*] If you'll begin, I'll follow in a moment.

VON POPPE

Off at dawn! [*Fussily, wiping his brow and short, stubbly white hair.*] And I no nearer my end! [*To Claire.*] Oh, Mademoiselle, will *you* help me? [*Impressively.*] Perhaps you could make her relent.

CLAIRE [*smiling*]

Is it a receipt?

VON POPPE [*excitedly*]

A most complicated one! I have tried every means, but no, it is patriotism with her!

CLAIRE

Which is it?

VON POPPE [*throwing up his eyes*]

That divine omelette! Ah, what *is* it?

[*Thoughtfully, with his head on one side.*] That delectable taste, in the innermost roll?

CLAIRE

Mathilde would never tell me!

VON POPPE

It is wrong! Such secrets should not die! I have thought and thought . . . [*repeating softly and rhythmically to himself, emphasizing his words with his finger, as if conducting*] "Beat in the eggs a few mushrooms —"

CLAIRE

"With the dew on them," Mathilde always says!

VON POPPE

Ah, she is a poet, too! One sees that in her flavoring. All great artists are! Then —

CLAIRE

A lemon?

VON POPPE

A taste! There are only three leaves of mint, remember! [*Earnestly.*] It must not be too strong!

CLAIRE

Olives?

VON POPPE

Cut *very* fine!

[*He continues to use his finger, as if conducting, at every sentence.*]

CLAIRE

A few peppers —

VON POPPE [*in a horrified tone*]

A few slices!

CLAIRE

And —

VON POPPE [*sighing deeply, and dropping his hand with its imaginary baton*]

It is just that "and"! What *is* next? Shall I ever find out? [*Despairingly.*] And we go at dawn! [*As Claire turns away.*] Ah, Mademoiselle Claire! I am feeling profoundly. I have a reputation. If I could introduce that receipt at my club!

VON BECKNER [*impatiently*]

Frankly, Von Poppe, had n't we better get to work?

VON POPPE

Oh, I know, but [*excitedly*] I will try just once more! [*Moving to the door* (*L*).] After all, she is human — only *once* more! Then we will begin.

CLAIRE

It will be no use! She would not tell even Papa, and she's devoted to him. He might forget and tell some one!

VON POPPE [*shocked*]

She is quite right. But me [*turning up his eyes*] — Cossacks could not draw it from me! [*Going to the door* (*L*).] Belgium were well lost — if I knew! [*Exit.*]

VON BECKNER [*going over to Claire*]

Your father is no spy!

CLAIRE [*quietly*]

No. It is I.

VON BECKNER [*alarmed*]

You? My God! What do you mean?

CLAIRE [*as if she had not heard him*]

General von Gertner will believe Papa —

he is like glass! Then, perhaps . . . [*her eyes fixed*] they will come for me!

VON BECKNER [*in a tense whisper*]

For *you?*

CLAIRE

That is why I must tell you.

VON BECKNER [*emphatically*]

You must escape!

CLAIRE

The place will be watched. You must see that. If he has gone —

VON BECKNER

Who?

CLAIRE

Colonel Goltz. He will have left orders. [*After a pause.*] No, I am safest here!

VON BECKNER [*passionately*]

Tell me —

CLAIRE

Nothing . . . but my danger! [*Gently.*] Believe me, it is better so.

VON BECKNER [*fervently*]

But I love you.

CLAIRE

Then surely [*looking up at him*] you must not know!

VON BECKNER

But how can I help you?

CLAIRE

If — if I should call —

VON BECKNER [*eagerly, pointing to latticed window above the porch*]

You sleep there?

CLAIRE

Yes.

VON BECKNER

And your father next?

CLAIRE

Yes.

VON BECKNER [*hurriedly*]

If he does not get back, Mathilde will be with you?

CLAIRE

Yes.

VON BECKNER

And I [*pointing to the porch*] — I sleep there.

CLAIRE

I knew it.

VON BECKNER

When I first saw you, I thought of my sister.

CLAIRE [*putting her hand in his*]

Comrade!

VON BECKNER [*reverently kissing it*]

For life!

CLAIRE [*sadly drawing her hand from his, and turning away*]

I shall never marry. We shall be poor now — there will be hardly enough for a dot for Marie!

VON BECKNER [*passionately*]

What difference will that make to me?

CLAIRE

But your people? And how would they like — an enemy? And mine! No [*shaking her head*] — it cannot be!

VON BECKNER

Perhaps not now, but there will not always be war!

CLAIRE [*sadly*]

I cannot tell.

VON BECKNER [*passionately*]

Claire, give me some hope!

CLAIRE [*turning swiftly, and looking at him*]

Don't you see? I trust you, and I am alone — but for you!

VON POPPE [*coming suddenly out of the door* (*L*)]

It is useless, I give up! [*Proudly, puffing out his chest.*] I shall have to invent it myself! Come, Von Beckner!

[*Exit Von Poppe at door* (*R*).]

VON BECKNER [*hurriedly*]

Have you a pistol?

CLAIRE

Papa gave me one, but it has been taken.

VON BECKNER

When?

CLAIRE

This morning, after I left my room.

VON BECKNER

Did you tell your father?

CLAIRE [*shrugging her shoulders*]

What good would that do? He would only be wild! I must think for him — and for you!

VON POPPE'S VOICE [*from the house*]

Von Beckner!

VON BECKNER [*leaning over her*]

What can I do?

CLAIRE

Nothing now.

VON BECKNER

Was anything incriminating found?

CLAIRE

A letter was lost — or stolen.

VON BECKNER [*fearfully*]

Who could have taken it?

CLAIRE [*quietly*]

Colonel Goltz. I saw it in his face.

VON BECKNER [*despairingly*]

Then you're in his power!

[*Von Poppe comes to the door (R), which he holds open for Von Beckner. His voice has a sharp ring.*]

VON POPPE

Are you ever coming?

[*Exit Von Beckner, looking back anxiously at Claire, as Von Poppe holds door (R) open for him.*]

CLAIRE [*looking straight before her, repeating softly under her breath*]

Then I'm in his power!

CURTAIN

SCENE II

A DARK room, where only faint glimmering starlight from an opened latticed window enters. As one grows accustomed to the dimness, objects become visible, and, as the scene progresses, the room grows lighter as the sky changes to the first pale colors of dawn. In the corner (L), facing a closed door (R), is a small white-valanced bed, which has not been slept in; at its head crouches Claire de Montpalet, her eyes fixed on the door opposite. She has a peignoir over her nightdress, a thin scarf about her shoulders.

Suddenly a light shines under the door (R); there is a muffled sound in the next room, and the door shakes, as if something heavy had fallen against it. Then silence; after a moment the door is opened noiselessly, and the figure of Colonel Goltz shows silhouetted against a flickering light. He stands motionless, peering into the room.

CLAIRE [*in a husky whisper*]

Mathilde!

GOLTZ

She will not come.

CLAIRE

You've killed her! [*He steps across the threshold.*] I will scream if you come a step nearer!

GOLTZ

No one will hear. No one will come. [*Sneeringly.*] Your "comrade" has gone. I sent him off an hour ago — he's in Brussels now. *I'm* your only friend, and you need one! You're a spy. [*Touching his breast.*] I have the proof here. You get — justice. And [*warningly*] remember! Your father's life is in your hands. Concealed weapons have been found in this house.

CLAIRE [*proudly*]

General von Gertner will protect my father.

GOLTZ

General von Gertner left Brussels yesterday. You have one chance, otherwise you and your father are shot!

CLAIRE

Then I am shot!

GOLTZ [*going swiftly toward her*]

But mine first!

CLAIRE [*struggling with him*]

Help!

[*Fritz von Beckner appears at the window ledge, and jumps into the room. In his hand he has a pistol, which he points at Goltz, who, at the noise of his entrance, has spun round quickly, holding Claire in front of him, and reaching for his sword.*]

GOLTZ

So you disobeyed. Traitor! Now, shoot — if you dare!

[*Von Beckner's arm drops at his side as he faces Claire, and Goltz draws his sword and runs him through the breast. Von Beckner falls back against the wall.*]

CLAIRE [*desperately*]

Shoot! Shoot!

[*Von Beckner, who is mortally wounded, raises his pistol, but, as he looks at Claire, it drops at his side again.*]

CLAIRE

You promised! Before it is too late! Oh, my love, it's the only way!

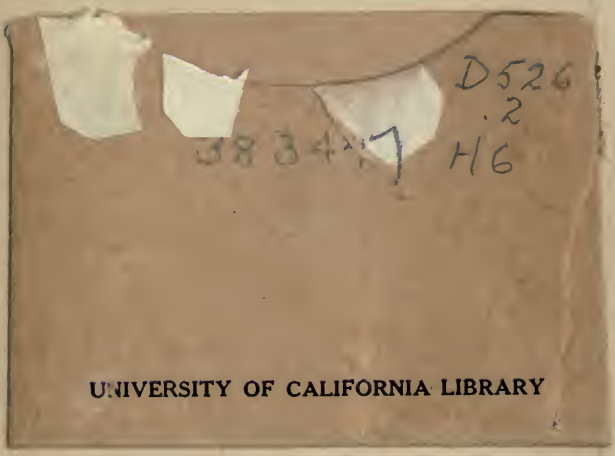
[*Von Beckner staggers forward, shoots Claire in the breast, and falls dead at her feet. Goltz lets Claire, who is instantly killed, slip from his arms to the ground, and, stooping, wipes his sword with her scarf as he looks down at the two dead faces.*]

GOLTZ [*huskily*]

"With his life," she said!

[*Straightening himself, he puts his sword in its scabbard, and goes out of the door, which he closes behind him.*

In a few minutes the sound of bugles is heard, and the noise of soldiers marching past.]

CURTAIN

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